

# THE LAST SHOT

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by FREDERICK PALMER

## SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—At their home on the frontier between the Browns and Grays, Maria, daughter of the late Captain Lanstron, staff intelligence officer of the Browns, is injured by a fall in his aeroplane.

CHAPTER II—Ten years later, Westerling, nominal chief but real chief of staff, reinforces South La Tir, meditates on war, and speculates on the comparative ages of himself and Maria, who is visiting in the Gray capital.

CHAPTER III—Westerling calls on Maria. She tells him of her teaching children the follies of war and martial patriotism, begs him to prevent war while he is chief of staff, and predicts that if he makes war against the Browns he will not win.

CHAPTER IV—On the march with the 3d of the Browns Private Stranaky, anarchist, declares war and played-out patriotism and is placed under arrest. Colonel Lanstron overhears, begs him of saying the anarchist will fight well when enraged and is "all man."

CHAPTER V—Lanstron calls on Maria at her home. He talks with Feller, the gardener. Maria tells Lanstron that she believes Feller to be a spy. Lanstron confesses it is true.

CHAPTER VI—Lanstron shows Maria a telephone which Feller has concealed in a secret passage under the tower for use to benefit the Browns in war emergencies, pointing out its value as being in the center of the fighting zone in case of war. Maria consents for it and Feller to remain for the present. Lanstron declares his love for Maria.

CHAPTER VII—Westerling and the Gray premier plan to use a trivial international affair to foment warlike patriotism in army and people and strike before declaring war. Partow, Brown chief of staff, and Lanstron, made vice, discuss the trouble, and the Brown defense. Partow reveals his plans to Lanstron.

CHAPTER VIII—At the frontier the two armies lie crouched for attack and defense. In the town with the non-combatants fleeing from the danger zone, Maria hears her child pupils recite the peace oath.

CHAPTER IX—The Gray army crosses the border line and attacks. The Browns check them. Artillery, infantry, aeroplanes and dirigibles engage. Stranaky, rising to make the anarchist speech of his life, draws the Gray artillery fire. Nicked by a shrapnel splinter, he goes berserk and fights "all a man."

CHAPTER X—Maria has her first glimpse of war in its modern, cold, scientific, murderous brutality. She allows the secret telephone to remain.

CHAPTER XI—The Browns fall back to the Galland house. Stranaky forages. Maria sees a night attack.

CHAPTER XII—The Grays attack in force. The call of the fight too strong for Feller, he leaves his secret telephone and goes back to his gun. Stand to hand fighting. The Browns fall back again.

CHAPTER XIII—Maria asks Lanstron over the secret telephone to appeal to Partow to stop the fighting. Vandalism by Gray soldiers in the Galland house and Maria is notified. Will be made Westerling's headquarters.

CHAPTER XIV—Westerling and his staff occupy the Galland house. At tea with Maria, Westerling begins to woo her, disclosing his selfish ambitions. Maria, apparently throws her fortune with the Grays and offers to give valuable information.

need of one. The wire seemed to quiver with the militant tension of her spirit. It was Maria's fate that she was talking at the other end; not as flame for him, but with a purpose that revealed all the latent strength of her personality and daring.

"I shall have to ask Partow. It's a pretty big thing."

"Yes—only that is not all my plan, my little plan. After they have taken the first line of defense—and they will get it, won't they?"

"Yes, we shall yield in the end, yield rather than suffer too great losses there that will weaken the defense on the main line."

"Then I want to know where it is that you want Westerling to attack on the main line, so that we can get him to attack there. That—that will help, won't it?"

"Yes."

"Of course, all the while I shall be getting news from him—when I have proved my loyalty and have his complete confidence—and I'll telephone it to you. I am sure I can get something worth while with you to direct me; don't you think so, Lanny?"

"Well," said Partow, looking up at the sound of Lanstron's step. Then he half raised himself from his chair at sight of a Lanstron with eyes in a "daze of brilliancy," a Lanstron with his maimed hand twitching in an outstretched gesture; a Lanstron in the dilemma of being at the same time lover and chief of intelligence. Should he let her make the sacrifice of everything that he held to be sacred to a woman's delirium? Should he not return to the telephone and tell her that he would not permit her to play such a part? Partow's voice cut in on his demoralization with the sharpness of a blade.

"Well, what, man, what?" he demanded. He feared that the girl might be dead. Anything that could upset Lanstron in this fashion struck a chord of sympathy and apprehension.

much in future. Would he get the return?

"A woman was the ideal one for the task we intrusted to Feller," he mused, "a gentlewoman, big enough, adroit enough, with her soul in the work as no paid woman's could be! There seemed no such one in the world!"

"But to let her do it!" gasped Lanstron.

"It is her suggestion, not yours? She offers herself? She wants no persuasion?" Partow asked sharply.

"Entirely her suggestion," said Lanstron. "She offers herself for her country—for the cause for which our soldiers will give their lives by the thousands. It is a time of sacrifice."

Partow raised his arms. They were not formless as he brought them down with sledge-hammer force to the table.



"I'm Going to Fight For the Browns—For My Home!"

"Your tendon of Achilles? My boy, she is your sword-arm!" His sturdy forefinger ran along the line of frontier under his eye with little staccato leaps. "Eh?" he chuckled significantly, finger poised.

"Let them up the Bordir road and on to redoubts 36 and 37, you mean?" asked Lanstron.

"You have it! The position looks important, but so well do we command it that it is not really vital. Yes, the Bordir road is her bait for Westerling!" Partow waved his hand as if the affair were settled.

"But," interjected Lanstron, "we have also to decide on the point of the main defense which she is to make. Westerling thinks it weak."

"Hm—!" grumbled Partow. "That is not necessary to start with. We can give that to her later over the telephone, can't we, eh?"

"Yes, an end—a speedy end!" said Westerling with a fine, inflexible emphasis. "That is your prayer and mine and the prayer of all lovers of humanity."

"It is little that I know, but such as it is you shall have it," she began.

she told him of Bordir, the weak point in the first line of the Browns' defense, she noted no change in his steady look; but with the mention of Engadir in the main line she detected a gleam in his eyes that had the merest hint of a cutting edge of steel. "I have made my sacrifice to some purpose? The information is worth something to you?" she asked, wistfully.

"Yes, yes! Yes, it promises that way," he replied thoughtfully.

Quietly he began a considerate catechism. Soon she was subtly understanding that her answers lacked the convincing details that he sought. She longed to avert her eyes from his for an instant, but she knew that this would be fatal. She felt the force of him directed in professional channels, free of all personal relations, beating as a strong light on her bare statements. How could a woman ever have learned two such vital secrets? How could it happen that two such critical points as Bordir and Engadir should go undefended? No tactician, no engineer but would have realized their strategic importance. Did she know what she was saying? How did she get her knowledge? These, she understood, were the real questions that underlay Westerling's polite introduction.

"But I have not told you the sources of my information! Isn't that like a woman!" she exclaimed. "You see, it did not concern me at all at the time I heard it. I didn't even realize its importance and I didn't hear much," she proceeded, her introduction giving time for improvisation. "You see, Partow was inspecting the premises with Colonel Lanstron. My

mother had known Partow in her younger days when my grandfather was premier. We had them both to luncheon."

"Yes?" put in Westerling, betraying his eagerness. Partow and Lanstron! Then her source was one of authority, not the gossip of subalterns!

"And it occurs to me now that, even while he was our guest," she interjected in sudden indignation—"that even while he was our guest Partow was planning to make our grounds a redoubt!"

"After luncheon I remember Partow saying, 'We are going to have a look at the crops,' and they went for a walk out to the knoll where the fighting began."

"Yes! When was this?" Westerling asked keenly.

"Only about six weeks ago," answered Maria.

"Later, I came upon them unexpectedly after they had returned," she went on. "They were sitting there on that seat concealed by the shrubbery. I was on the terrace steps unobserved and I couldn't help overhearing them. Their voices grew louder with the interest of their discussion. I caught something about appropriations and aeroplanes and Bordir and Engadir, and saw that Lanstron was pleading with his chief. He wanted a sum ap-



"I'm Going on My Experience as a Soldier."

propriated for fortifications to be applied to building planes and dirigibles. Finally, Partow consented, and I recall his exact words: 'They're shockingly archaically defended, especially Engadir,' he said, 'but they can wait until we get further appropriations in the fall!' She was so far under the spell of her own invention that she believed the reality of her words, reflected in her wide-open eyes which seemed to have nothing to hide.

"That is all," she exclaimed with a shudder—"all my eyes-drooping! If it—if it—!" and her voice trembled with the intensity of the one purpose that was shining with the light of truth through the murk of her deception—"It will only help to end the slaughter!" She held out her hand convulsively in parting as if she would leave the rest with him.

"I think it will," he said soberly. "I think it will prove that you have done a great service," he repeated as he caught both her hands, which were cold from her ordeal. His own were warm with the strong beating of his heart stirred by the promise of what he had just heard. But he did not prolong the grasp. He was as eager to be away to his work as she to be alone.

"I think it will. You will know in the morning," he added.

His steps were sturdier than ever in the power of five against three as he started back to the house. When he reached the veranda, Bouchard, the saturnine chief of intelligence, appeared in the doorway of the dining-room; or, rather, reappeared, for he had been standing there throughout the interview of Westerling and Maria, whose heads were just visible, above the terrace wall, to his hawk eyes.

"A little promenade in the open and my mind made up," said Westerling, clapping Bouchard on the shoulder.

"Something about an attack to-night?" asked Bouchard.

"You guess right. Call the others." Five minutes later he was seated at the head of the dining-room table with his chiefs around him waiting for their chairman to speak. He asked some categorical questions almost perfunctorily, and the answer to each was, "Ready!" with, in some instances, a qualification—the qualification made by regimental and brigade commanders that, though they could take the

position in front of them, the cost would be heavy. Yes, all were willing and ready for the first general assault of the war, but they wanted to state the costs as a matter of professional self-defense.

Westerling could pose when it served his purpose. Now he rose and, going to one of the wall maps, indicated a point with his forefinger.

"If we get that we have the most vital position, haven't we?"

Some uttered a word of assent; some only nodded. A glance or two of curiosity was exchanged. Why should the chief of staff ask so elementary a question? Westerling was not unconscious of the glances or of their meaning. They gave dramatic value to his next remark.

"We are going to mass for our main attack in front at Bordir!"

"But," exclaimed four or five officers at once, "that is the heart of the position! That is—"

"I believe it is weak—that it will fall, and tonight!"

"You have information, then, information that I have not?" asked Bouchard.

"No more than you," replied Westerling. "Not as much if you have anything new."

"Nothing!" admitted Bouchard wryly. He lowered his head under Westerling's penetrating look in the consciousness of failure.

"I am going on a conviction—on putting two and two together!" Westerling announced. "I am going on my experience as a soldier, as a chief of staff. If I am wrong, I take the responsibility. If I am right, Bordir will be ours before morning. It is settled!"

"If you are right, then," exclaimed Turcas—"well, then it's genius or—"

He did not finish the sentence. He had been about to say coincidence; while Westerling knew that if he were right all the rising skepticism in certain quarters, owing to the delay in his program, would be silenced. His prestige would be unassailable.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## Marking Time.

Soon after dark the attack began. Flashes from gun mouths and glowing sheets of flame from rifles made ugly revelry, while the beams of search-lights swept hither and thither. This kept up till shortly after midnight, when it died down and, where hell's concert had raged, silent darkness shrouded the hills. Maria knew that Bordir was taken without having to ask Lanstron or wait for confirmation from Westerling.

She was seated in the recess of the arbor the next morning, when she heard the approach of those regular, powerful steps whose character had become as distinct to her as those of a member of her own family. Five against three! Five against three! They were saying to her; while down the pass road and the castle road ran the stream of wounded from last night's slaughter.

Posted in the drawing-room of the Galland house were the congratulations of the premier to Westerling, who had come from the atmosphere of a staff that accorded to him a military insight far above the analysis of ordinary standards. But he was too clever a man to vaunt his triumph. He knew how to carry his honors. He accepted success as his due, in a matter-of-course manner that must inspire confidence in further success.

"You were right," he said to Maria easily, pleasantly. "We did it—we did it—we took Bordir with a loss of only twenty thousand men!"

Only twenty thousand! Her revelation at the bald statement was relieved by the memory of Lanny's word over the telephone after breakfast that the Browns had lost only five thousand. Four to one was a wide ratio, she was thinking.

"Then the end—then peace is so much nearer?" she asked.

"Very much nearer!" he answered earnestly, as he dropped on the bench beside her.

He stretched his arms out on the back of the seat and the relaxed attitude, unusual with him, brought into relief a new trait of which she had been hitherto oblivious. The conqueror had become simply a companionable man. Though he was not sitting close to her, yet, as his eyes met hers, she had a desire to move away which she knew would be unwise to gratify. She was conscious of a certain softening charm, a magnetism that she had sometimes felt in the days when she first knew him. She realized, too, that then the charm had not been mixed with the indescribable, intimate quality that it held now.

"In the midst of congratulations after the position was taken last night," he declared, "I confess that I was thinking less of success than of its source." He bent on her a look that was warm with gratitude.

She lowered her lashes before it; before gratitude that made her part appear in a fresh angle of misery.

"There seems to be a kind of fatality about our relations," he went on. "I lay awake pondering it last night. His tone held more than gratitude. It had the elation of discovery.

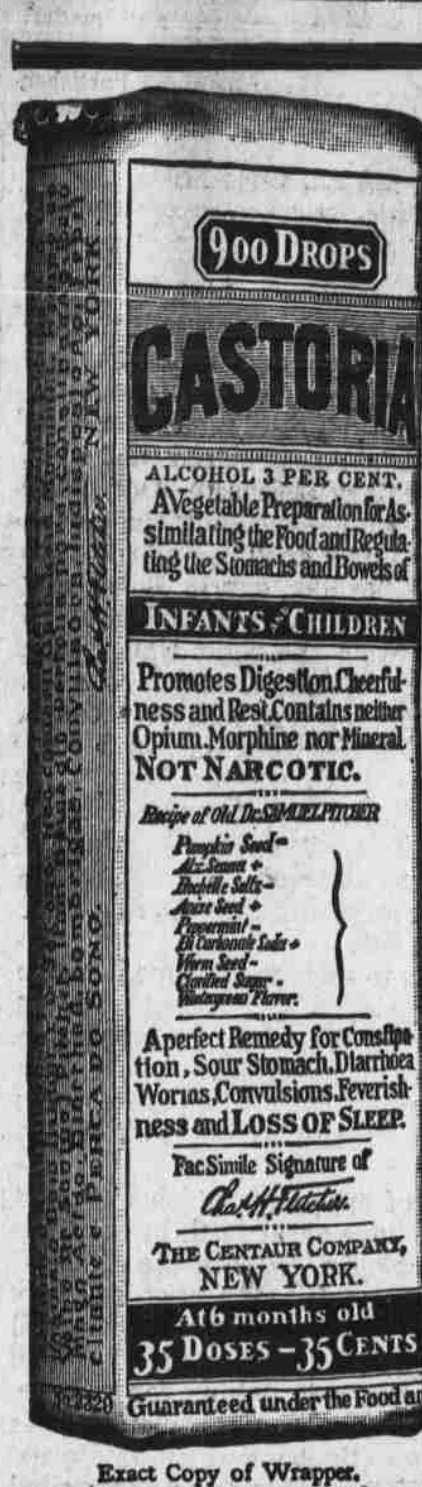
"He is going to make it harder than I ever guessed!" echoed her own thought, in a flutter of confusion.

## To be continued

## CANAAN

Prof. G. C. Wiles of Irwin, Pa., and Jessie Whonetler of Columbus, spent their holiday vacation here with their parents.

Family gatherings on Xmas day were held at the homes of P. E. Fet-



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- Asparagus Tips .....15c, 20c, 25c can
- 15c Jersey Gloves .....10c

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Mr. Blough and wife moved from the Taubert farm last week to the Smith farm on the car line at stop 110.

Wm. Marshall and family are visiting at Akron.

A. L. Lehn and wife ate Xmas dinner with their son, Rev. F. Lehn and family at Nankin.

John Oller and wife are entertaining company from Cleveland.

Mrs. Effie Smith of Canton, is visiting at the home of her brother, Arthur Fouch.

Relatives from Medina were entertained at the Bixler home on Sabbath.

Geo. Caskey and family of Wooster, were visitors at the P. E. Fetzer home the past week.

Chas. Snell spent Xmas in Cleveland.

U. A. Russell and son Chas., and Miss Joliff of Wooster, and Miss Esther Bowers of Creston, were guests at the Roy Gruner home over Sabbath.

Vella and Mina Scott attended the wedding anniversary of Chas. Whopseter and wife near Creston on last Wednesday.

Mr. Lookabaugh of Sterling visited the Ramsier families the first of the week.

Kenneth Miller and wife of Hermanville, were callers at the Scott home recently.

Dr. Geo. Tupper and wife of Cleveland, spent Christmas with J. W. Oller and family. Duty called the doctor back to the city early Saturday morning, his wife remaining to visit among friends for a week.

The Canaan M. E. church had very fine Xmas exercises and they were enjoyed by a large and appreciative audience.

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Teachers' examinations are held on the first Saturday of January, February, April, May, and on the last